

- Politics of Nationalism and Multiculturalism: Diasporan Sikhs in Pluralist Politics', *American Ethnologist* (Forthcoming).
73. See Stuart Hall's discussion, 'New Ethnicities' in Michael Kieth and Steve Pile (eds), *Place and Politics of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1993), 252, 259.
  74. Paul Gilroy, 'It Ain't Where You're From, It's Where You're At: The Dialectics of Diasporic Identification', *Third Text* (1987), 3-16.
  75. See Parminder Bachu, 'Multiple Migrants and Multiple Diasporas: Cultural Reproduction and Transformation among British Punjabi Women in the 1990s Britain', paper presented at the First International Conference on Punjab Studies, Coventry University, 26 June, 1994.
  76. See Harjot S. Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Three papers presented at the First International Conference on Punjab Studies, Coventry University, 25 June 1994, are also relevant: Indu Banga, 'Arya Samaj and Punjabi identity'; Anil Sethi, "'Hindu Water", "Muslim Water": Syncretism, Commensality and Community in late 19th and early 20th Century Punjab'; and Darshan Singh, 'Shah Mohanmad and Punjabi Identity'.

## The Punjabi Pioneer Experience and Recognition

Karen L.

University of  
Irvine

This article reviews the experience of Punjabi reference to Punjabi-Mexican families of the 19th century, which confirms the flexibility of ethnic identity and the anthropological concept of 'culture' in a new space. The Punjabi pioneers to America in the 19th century faced more constraints than opportunities when they came to America, and their history which deserves full recognition and more recent Punjabi immigrants have

Most of the early Punjabi immigrants came to the US as members of a biethnic community. Some were Mexican and Mexican-American and some were pioneer immigrants to America from India. The experience has been very selectively chosen to erase their family life.<sup>1</sup> Children of Punjabis presents a problem to the immigrants decades later, for not only did they lose their community and religion in making their new lives, but they left behind Punjabi spouses and immigrants from India, confronted with the Punjabi-Mexican families, have not known the place of the several hundred biethnic marriages. The Punjabi pioneer experience is a place that scholars of both South Asia and America have much to learn from.

that experience. In particular, those currently concerned with 'post-modern' identity formations should recognise that identity has always been historically contingent, that immigrants and members of their host societies have always experienced ruptures and redefinitions of self as a consequence of settling and unsettling encounters.<sup>2</sup>

### THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY CONTEXT

The situation in early twentieth century America presented the men from India with many constraints and few opportunities, and they made the most of the opportunities. They entered the US just before immigration laws began to discriminate against all Asians, in 1917 (the Barred Zone Act) and 1924 (the National Origins Quota Act). As they began farming in California, the state enacted laws (in 1913 and 1920) against the owning and leasing of agricultural land by non-citizens ('aliens ineligible to citizenship'), laws to which they were subjected in 1923. They were also prevented from marrying women of other 'races', by state anti-miscegenation laws (California's was repealed in 1948).<sup>3</sup> Yet these men persevered. Unable to bring their wives and families from India because of the tightened immigration laws, those who wanted a stable family life in the US married predominantly Spanish-speaking women, producing families known locally as 'Mexican-Hindus'.<sup>4</sup> (In early twentieth century US, 'Hindu' meant a person from India, not necessarily a person who was a Hindu by religion.) Their children, the second generation, grew up valuing their 'Hindu' heritage highly, and they and their descendants continue to claim 'Hindu' (South Asian) ethnicity.

The origins of the Punjabi-Mexican community lie in the Imperial Valley along California's southern border, a valley the Punjabis likened to those in the Punjab<sup>5</sup> as they flocked there to work the newly irrigated land in the first decade of the twentieth century. The inauguration of the Imperial Irrigation District in 1911 signalled the valley's transformation from a barren desert to a major centre of agricultural production in California. By 1919 there were six towns in the Imperial Valley with populations ranging from 1000 to 7000, and nine newspapers were being published.<sup>6</sup> The Punjabis encountered both legal constraints and social stereotypes based on race and national origin as they worked alongside others to develop the valley.

Men of many nationalities came to work in the valley, but those who controlled it were native-born whites. Indigenous Cocopah Indians, Mexicans crossing the border to escape the turmoil of the 1910 Revolution and blacks recruited from the American south were all enlisted to pick

cotton and do other agricultural labour. The Punjabis made their first appearance as farm labourers in 1909 and 1910—the names of 18 men in the 1910 US Census of Population are unmistakably Punjabi (although misspelled).<sup>7</sup> The 1920 Census counted 43453 people in the county, with Mexicans, Japanese and American blacks especially prominent (15 per cent, 5 per cent and 4 per cent of the population, respectively); the Punjabis were as numerous as the Swiss and German immigrants (about 250 of each).<sup>8</sup> Initially there was some ethnic specialisation in farming, with the Japanese farmers growing brush-covered cantaloupe, tomatoes and squash and the Swiss opening dairies,<sup>9</sup> but they learned from each other and such differences lessened.

In the early years, women were scarce in the Imperial Valley. The 1910 Census gives a sex ratio in the new county of almost 2:1—8900 males to 4691 females. By 1920 the population was 40 per cent female, with greater imbalances among the immigrant groups. The foreign-born whites (72 per cent of them from Mexico) were 37 per cent female and the Japanese were 28 per cent female, while the American blacks were 43 per cent female. There were no women from India and only two of the 88 Chinese residents were female.<sup>10</sup> Since most women shared fully in the hard work on the family farms,<sup>11</sup> wives were wanted; men went back to their homelands for brides, or sent for them. Many early Swiss and Japanese wives were 'mail order' or 'picture brides',<sup>12</sup> but by the time the Punjabis wanted to bring spouses from India they could not legally do so. Racial and ethnic diversity was accompanied by segregation and discrimination based on both race and class. Like many other farmers, the Punjabis lived along the country roads and canals and came into town primarily for business or recreation. But they were not free to go where they wished.<sup>13</sup> The towns in the valley developed 'foreign sections' on the east side of the railroad tracks. One Punjabi old-timer explained: 'There was discrimination then, in El Centro the same; even water; nobody served you. So the Mexicans, the Japanese, the China people opened places and served everybody.'<sup>14</sup> Punjabis also owned bars in the foreign sections of Brawley and El Centro, and law and order enforcement was more lax in those sections. As families settled in the valley, the local school systems reflected the racial, ethnic and class divisions, with separate schools serving the various sections of the towns.<sup>15</sup>

Newcomers could get a start in the early days of Imperial Valley agriculture. Even small farmers without much capital could grow crops familiar to them from previous experience. Homesteaders could file for 320 acres (two quarter sections), and they experimented with field or garden crops. Cotton had the largest acreage in 1920 and lettuce became the most important truck crop, with the third largest acreage in 1930.<sup>16</sup>

Cotton was risky because of fluctuations in the world market and its susceptibility to pests, while lettuce was risky because of the costly investment and the importance of 'hitting the (eastern) market' when the price was right. Punjabi farmers were among the first to grow these risky but profitable crops.

Grain crops planted and harvested with work animals gave way rapidly to cash crops produced with tractors, specialised irrigation equipment, fertilizers and pesticides. As individual and corporate landholdings became larger by the decade, especially after 1940,<sup>17</sup> the agricultural industry became dominated by big growers, shippers (shipping companies) and bankers. Small farmers were at a disadvantage since shipping costs and the price the produce would bring at its destination could not be predicted. Only labour costs could be partially controlled by farmers, so access to labour was crucial and so was access to credit from local bankers who knew the farmers well and could set their own lending policies. Farmers could also sometimes secure advances from shippers. Tenant farming became dominant in the Imperial Valley, and it was associated with undesirable features: it meant an unstable, highly speculative, specialised type of farming with high seasonal labour requirements. Tenancy also could mean insecurity and instability of land occupancy and ownership; most large companies and absentee owners leased for only three years at a time.<sup>18</sup> But the Imperial Valley's highly competitive agricultural economy was fast becoming a major if not the major producing region in California.<sup>19</sup>

The Punjabis were early participants in this growing Imperial Valley economy and they soon began to lease and buy land, despite opposition. In 1910, the *Holtville Tribune* printed a critical article on 'the Hindu and his habits and why he should be prohibited at once from landing in California.' Noting that a few Hindus had appeared on the streets of Holtville, the writer opined that 'Cotton picking time is attracting a doubtful looking bunch of all shades and kinds,' people who threatened the 'college-bred population, its culture and refinement'.<sup>20</sup> After 1913, admission through legal channels was difficult, and the 1917 Immigration Law barred most Asians, but men from India continued to arrive in the Imperial Valley. By 1918 the press betrayed the worry that they were becoming 'a menace to the whole valley' for a new reason: the Hindu was 'no longer a day laborer. He has quickly attained the point where he is only willing to farm [for] himself, and his low standard of living makes it impossible for the American to compete with him.'<sup>21</sup> By the 1920s, the Secretary of the El Centro Chamber of Commerce was saying: 'We need

the labor of the Mexicans. They are not like the Japs and Hindus. They don't come to stay. They are satisfied to labor.'<sup>22</sup>

Certainly the Punjabis had moved up from their status as 'laborers' in the 1910 Census. They were listed as 'ranchers' in local directories of 1912-26, and they were early telephone subscribers and senders of foreign money orders from the Holtville post office by 1913.<sup>23</sup> Whereas in other parts of California, Punjabi men stayed in labour camps or rooming houses, in the Imperial Valley they lived in wooden shacks on the land they were farming, typically in households of two to four persons. (Better housing was usually not available to them or even desired, since many leased different acreage from year to year.) Leases recorded in the county courthouse show many Punjabi partnerships,<sup>24</sup> and despite a series of cotton bankruptcies after World War I, Punjabis were becoming successful farmers in the Valley.<sup>25</sup> Even the potentially serious setback posed by the 1923 Supreme Court decision that persons from India, although Caucasian, were not 'white persons' in the popular meaning of the term and were therefore (like other Asians) 'aliens ineligible to citizenship' did not stop them. The 1923 ruling meant that the Punjabis, according to California's Alien Land Laws, could not lease or own agricultural land, but they found ways of working around these laws<sup>26</sup> and stayed on in the US, establishing families.

### 'AMERICAN' MARRIAGES

There were customary and legal constraints on the Punjabi men even in the domestic arena. Because California's anti-miscegenation laws prohibited marriages between people of different races, and most people classified the Punjabis as non-white, marriage for the Punjabi men was not a simple matter of choosing among the single women in the Imperial Valley. And even after marriage, the demographic patterns of marriage and childbearing testify to the difficult conditions the Punjabi men and their families experienced in rural California.<sup>27</sup> Family members' testimonies of conflict and accommodation within the biethnic families speak vividly about the social world in which the Punjabi pioneers lived. As the most wealthy and prominent men among the Punjabis began marrying, their marriages were front page news. Sher Singh, a Holtville cotton farmer, reportedly took out a licence for a Mexican bride in March of 1931.<sup>28</sup> When another well-to-do Holtville cotton farmer, B.K. Singh, married the 16-year old daughter of one of his tenants in 1918, it was headlined 'Hindu Weds White Girl by Stealing Away to Arizona.'<sup>29</sup> The article doubted that the clerk in Yuma had acted legally, since Imperial

County would not issue a licence for a Punjabi and a white woman. The men even had difficulty employing white women as house cleaners and cooks.<sup>30</sup>

Local Anglo opinion, however, did approve the Punjabi men's relationships with 'Mexican girls'. The official witnesses for the first and fourth such marriages included a prominent Anglo farmer and the County Horticultural Commissioner,<sup>31</sup> and marriage licences were soon issued routinely to Punjabi men and women of Mexican ancestry. These early marriages did cause conflict between Punjabi and Mexican men in the area,<sup>32</sup> and the women were generally perceived to be moving away from the growing Mexican-American community and into a 'Mexican-Hindu' community dominated by the Punjabi men.

Cotton was the crop which brought together most of the Punjabis and the women they married. Mexican families displaced by the Mexican Revolution were moving across the border into the United States, finding work in cotton fields from Texas to Southern California. This was family labour, and women and children worked alongside men.<sup>33</sup> The labour market and the Punjabi-Mexican marriage networks began in El Paso, Texas, and extended to California's Imperial Valley.<sup>34</sup> One marriage to a Punjabi led to others as the Mexican women called relatives and friends and helped arrange more matches.

In southern California, the Punjabi-Hispanic marriages began in 1916,<sup>35</sup> when Sher Singh and Antonia Alvarez married; in 1917, Sher's partner Gopal Singh married Antonia's sister Anna Anita. The weddings were civil ceremonies in El Centro, the first one witnessed by a leading Anglo farmer and Gopal Singh, the second witnessed by the first couple. The women had been picking cotton on the Punjabis' land. Like others who were to marry Punjabis, these sisters had moved from Mexico with their mother to El Paso and then the Imperial Valley. The brides were 18 and 21, the men were 36 and 37. By 1919 two of their sisters and a niece had also married Punjabis.<sup>36</sup> No attempts were made to carry out Punjabi marriage customs. One wife remembers that when she married, 'another Hindu offered me money, but my husband did not accept, saying "we are not in our country."'<sup>37</sup>

The sister-partner marriage patterns produced complex relationships, linking many Mexican women and Punjabi partners (for example, one can diagram linkages between members of the Duarte, Aguirre, Villa, Wilson, Rasul, Mallobox, Deen, Singh and Din families). The household arrangements were complex as well, with partners commonly residing in joint households with their brides. The men and women lived in wooden buildings on the land they were leasing, out along the irrigation canals and

country roads. The Sikh men took off their turbans but kept on the iron wrist bangles, and husbands or bachelor partners taught the Hispanic wives how to prepare Punjabi-style vegetables and chicken curry. Some of these bachelor householders stayed on as helpful 'uncles' when the children came.

Table 1 below shows the distribution of marriages made by the Punjabis in California through 1949 by type of spouse and region. The table places couples in the region where they first settled, where their initial children were born. It ends with 1949 because after that date it was possible to bring wives or brides from India.<sup>38</sup>

Table 1  
*Spouses of Asian Indians in California, 1913-1949*

Counties	Hispanic		Anglo		Black		Indian		American Indian		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Yuba	45	50	25	28.1	9	10.1	8	9.0	2	2.3	89	23.6
Sutter	6											
Sacramento												
San Joaquin												
Fresno	38	76	11	22.0	0	0	1	2.0	0	0	50	13.2
Tulare												
Kings												
Imperial	221	92	12	5.0	6	2.5	0	0	0	0	239	63.2
Los Angeles	5											
San Diego												
Totals	304	80	48	12.7	15	4.0	9	2.4	2	.5	378	100

Source: Karen Leonard, family reconstitution from county records (vital statistics, civil and criminal records) and interviews with informants.

These marriage networks were based in the Imperial Valley, where almost two-thirds of the couples lived and 93 per cent of the wives were Hispanic. Most marriages occurred there or in adjacent San Diego or Yuma, and most children were born and spent their early years in the valley, but the geographic range was initially very wide. The marriages involved Sikh, Muslim and Hindu Punjabis from all over California, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Texas and even Mexico and Canada for the first decade or so. The men travelled great distances for their own and others' marriages—at least 70 men married outside of California but settled in California. Many of the women were recent immigrants from Mexico. Up in northern California, only about half the wives were Spanish

speakers, while another 40 per cent spoke English and 9 per cent spoke Punjabi. Family and community life developed somewhat differently in the northern, central and southern regions because of these facts.<sup>39</sup>

The marriages differed greatly from those arranged back in India in terms of age, religion and spousal background. The age difference by sex was quite systematic: for the first generation couples, the average age at marriage for the men was 35 and for the women 23; the median ages were 34 and 20.<sup>40</sup> Religious boundaries important in India were not tightly maintained in California: an early intermarriage involved a Sikh man in the San Joaquin Valley and the daughter of Punjabi Muslim immigrants to Canada,<sup>41</sup> and Sikhs, Muslims and Mexicans witnessed each other's marriages frequently. Most couples were married in civil ceremonies, although there were a few Catholic weddings.

While the 25 earliest marriages had included a variety of spouses,<sup>42</sup> the balance soon shifted heavily to Hispanic women. The most important reason for this was California's anti-miscegenation laws, voided only in 1948, which prohibited marriages between persons of different races. When a man and woman applied for a marriage licence, the country clerk had to fill out the blank for 'race' on the licence with the same word. For the Punjabis and their intended spouses, clerks sometimes wrote 'brown', sometimes 'black', and sometimes 'white', depending on the applicants' skin colouring (and also on the county); Hispanic women provided the best matches. Another reason for the marriages to Hispanic women lay in the tendency for women married to Punjabis to arrange similar matches for their female relatives. Then there was some pressure from other Punjabis against marriages with black women. In northern California, however, the smaller and more diverse groups of wives included several well-respected black women.<sup>43</sup>

The stories most people told about these marriages involved some kind of courtship, some choice on the part of the woman. One woman told of her husband-to-be cavorting on his horse in the row ahead of her as she picked cotton, while his partner dropped a gaily coloured handkerchief over her sister's hair. Another woman, whose uncle was weighmaster to Punjabi cotton growers, fell in love with the boss at first sight. And a daughter talked of how her mother met her father: 'She worked for my father, although not very hard—she was a very beautiful woman!'<sup>44</sup>

Often the situation was such that marriage was the best available option for these women, especially when the groom was one's boss or another man of the farmer class. As one man said of his parents' marriage: 'Pakistanis were growing cotton on both sides of Dogwood. When they hired workers, my mother was among them. Tom whistled at her and she

liked him. Lupe's parents were happy, she had married a boss.' One woman told of her situation, deserted at 18 with two children and how she decided to make what turned out to be a successful marriage.

Through my sister and her husband who was Hindu, I met my husband. I was thinking, now what am I going to do, left alone with two children and without being able to work. He was a nice person and single, so to get a father and home for my children I married him.

There were stories of occasional bride purchase by the Punjabis, and there were also stories of love matches; both were outnumbered by accounts which emphasised economic security as the woman's basic motivation.<sup>45</sup>

One daughter speculated about an instrumental motive when she said, 'I think in the old times the Mexican women were like an instrument to the Hindu people because they wanted children to buy properties in the children's names, because they could not buy any property in their own names.'<sup>46</sup> But the allegation of a narrow economic motivation for the marriages is not correct, although new immigrants from India, anxious to explain the marriages out of caste and community, told me that the wives could hold land for the men and often did so. As *India West* put it in a story praising one pioneer: 'To counter loneliness and to gain the rights of property-ownership he did not, like many others, re-marry Mexican girls here.'<sup>47</sup> However, the men were not barred from owning and leasing land until 1923 (when they lost access to citizenship and came under the jurisdiction of the Alien Land Laws), and the biethnic marriage pattern was established well before that date. In any case, the wives acquired the status of their husbands upon marriage, not the reverse.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the begetting of children, who were American citizens by birth and therefore able to hold land, was not the main motivation for these marriages, since most Punjabis in the Imperial Valley did not begin putting land in the names of their children until 1934, well after most marriages had occurred and many children had been born.<sup>49</sup> So these marriages were not opportunistic attempts to secure land but commitments to permanent residence in the United States. They reflect the men's decisions not to return to India and their families there.

### PUNJABI MEXICAN LIFE

The Punjabi-Mexican families, wherever they settled in California, but particularly in the Imperial Valley, formed a distinctive new community. Outsiders viewed the men, women and children as a community, terming them Hindus, Mexican-Hindus or Hindu-Mexicans. There were collective

activities—weddings, dinners and dances, holiday outings—in which both men and women participated. The men developed new networks through their experiences as shipmates and workmates in California agriculture (with Hindu bosses, Hindu crews, Hindu camps). Networks based on kinship, so fundamental to Punjabi society, were weak in California since usually only one or two members of a coparcenary group had migrated. But the men's places of origin in India, along with religion and caste, continued to be important means of identifying and differentiating them. Among the women, places of origin in Mexico were relatively unimportant. Kinship was the most obvious basis of the female networks, and the *compadrazgo* or godparent system supplemented this (the system of fictive kinship or sponsorship through the Catholic Church).<sup>50</sup> However, since the godparents were almost entirely drawn from within the Punjabi-Mexican community, the *compadrazgo* system functioned primarily to strengthen relationships between the Punjabi-Mexican couples, not to integrate the Punjabi men into the local Mexican-American communities.

The wives of the Punjabis learned little about the religious, caste and regional networks stemming from the Punjab. Securely based in female kin groups here, most of them had little curiosity about India. Examples of their comments are:

My husband was a member of the Singh religion...he was twenty, twenty-one years older than me [sic] but this race does not look old.... My husband's partner told me that if a Muslim came to the door, the Hindu would not let him in but would talk to him outside.

Or 'Oh, yes, we ate beef, but there was another kind of Hindu, called Mohammedan, and they didn't eat pork'; 'Her three husbands were all Mohameds, though I'm not sure, one couldn't eat beef and another pork...'; 'My husband told me the Hindus and the Pakistanis do not like each other in India, but here they are all united.'<sup>51</sup>

There were very few relationships between Hispanic wives and the few Punjabi wives in California. There were no women from India in the Imperial Valley, the stronghold of Punjabi-Mexican family life. In northern California, there were four wives from India, one in the Yuba City area and three others in Loomis and near Orangevale; the latter three were relatively isolated, from each other as well as from other Punjabi-fathered families. The 'real Indian' families in rural California, before the late 1940s, were far from being centres of Punjabi community life; rather, they were isolated and set apart.<sup>52</sup>

The Punjabi men built a strong Punjabi network as they moved and worked throughout California. The Sikh temple at Stockton, the only one

in the state until 1947, drew not only Sikhs but all the Punjabi men and their families for political and social activities, while the Ghadar party<sup>53</sup> and the drive for United States citizenship also mobilised Punjabi men and money. The women and children were not well-integrated into most of these activities; even though some wives and children travelled with the men to agricultural jobs all over the state, many others went to the Stockton temple regularly, and most were familiar with Punjabi political leaders and economic brokers. And the female view of the men's activities was often quite different from the male view. The women and children have their own, distinctive memories of the Stockton Sikh temple. For them, it was a stopping place on travels around the state, a place to sleep and eat Punjabi food, a place to see many 'uncles' and other Punjabi-Mexican children. Here children from the Imperial Valley met those coming over from Phoenix and elsewhere to work in the northern California orchards. Usually the women and children went to the movies or for ice-cream in downtown Stockton while the men talked politics (in Punjabi) at the temple. At the temple, the women smoked together in the bathrooms and gossiped (in Spanish or English) while the children played.<sup>54</sup>

The Punjabi men's relations with Mexican-Americans and local Mexican-American society were not close, despite some similarities between the men and women which were most striking at the time these marriages began to occur. Like Mexicans, the Punjabis were discriminated against by white society. At least half of the women, like the men, were pioneers in a new country and from a group also entering the agricultural economy as labourers. The signatures of bride and groom alike on the marriage certificates testify to low levels of literacy. The men were learning Spanish to deal with Mexican agricultural labourers and to speak to their wives. Yet the men from India did not associate themselves with Mexican-American culture or institutions. Relatively few were close to their wives' male relatives. There were men, particularly those whose wives died and left them with children to raise, who 'turned Mexican' as their wives' relatives and their own children socialised them through domestic life. But Punjabi male camaraderie did not include Mexican men. The all-male socialising and drinking groups which met in the town parks, in bars and in each other's homes conversed in Punjabi and excluded all who could not speak or follow that language.

Within the homes, both vigorous contests and loving accommodations could characterise the Punjabi-Mexican marriages. Relationships with women in the American west involved some very real adaptations and discomforts for the Punjabi men as they learned new relationships between

love, marriage and divorce. Above all, the men learned about women's right to divorce. Mola Singh eloquently testified about his experiences:

In this country, it's a different class of people. You can't force love here, women go where they want to, even if they're married, even with three or four kids. In India, you could only get a divorce after India got freedom. Here, women go away, here it's different. The woman is the boss in this country. A woman can have four husbands, a man can have two or three women. What you gonna do, that's the way with love.... Sometimes I feel like I'm suffering here, you know, trouble at home. Here, when you marry, you have woman trouble, kid trouble, not like in India. When I got here, I saw, you have liberty, women have liberty, you know. The way it is here, I've been separated, divorced. In India, you stay together all your life. In this country, you have love. When you love a person, you stay with her, with her kids and everything. I divorced Carmen, when she went away to Mexico. I couldn't do anything, so I filed for divorce. She had two more kids by then. My wife in India, she'd died already by that time. Yes, I knew about divorce. In this country, I no sleep. Everybody was divorced, I could see what they were doing. It's only normal, you see the customs of the country, and so you have to do that. In this country, when she wants to go, my wife, she says, 'All right, sonny honey, I'm going', and I say, 'I can't stop you.' It's because of love, therefore I couldn't stop her.<sup>55</sup>

The themes of Mola Singh's narrative—romantic love as the basis of marriage, men's inability to exercise effective control over women, the ever-present possibility of divorce—lie behind the relatively high incidence of murder, divorce and remarriage in this community.<sup>56</sup> There were also many stable, happy marriages among these couples. The long-lasting couples successfully negotiated certain immediate obstacles, such as expectations that a wife would cook and clean for several partners as well as her husband. Surprisingly, the existence of wives and children back in India did not prove a major source of marital instability in California. Some of the women knew their husbands had been married in India, while others found out later or preferred not to know. Some men had lost their Indian wives in the 1918 influenza epidemic but kept in touch with relatives and sent money to those children who had survived. One man arranged for his brother back in the Punjab to take over responsibility for his wife and daughter. Some husbands simply stopped writing, but many others did tell their California wives about their Indian wives and families and sent remittances for years.<sup>57</sup> The diversion of funds to India became an issue within some families, but most Punjabi-Mexican wives and

children accepted that as a minimal fulfilment of Indian family responsibilities. The relative in India, distanced by law as well as geography, had little reality in the early decades of Punjabi-Mexican family life in California.

Some degree of bilingualism characterised the successful marriages, although few of the men were rated excellent speakers of Spanish and no wife ever really learned to speak Punjabi well (many understood it adequately). But real mastery of a common language seemed relatively unimportant; in any case, many people argued that there were similarities between Punjabi and Spanish. 'Spanish is just like Punjabi, really', they said, illustrating the point with examples of similar words and grammatical constructions. Not only language, but other aspects of Punjabi and Mexican culture were viewed as essentially similar, and the long-time spouses expressed respect for each other's cultures.<sup>58</sup> Unable to visit the Punjab in the early decades of their marriages, the woman found it harder to learn about Punjabi culture,<sup>59</sup> but many men reported on similarities. Rather than emphasise or even mention the anti-miscegenation laws which played a major role in determining their choice of spouses, the men and their descendants talked about the similar physical appearance of the Punjabi men and Mexican women. Further, they argued that Mexicans and Punjabis shared the same material culture. As Mola Singh, who has 13 children from three marriages with Mexican women, put it:

I no have to explain anything Hindu to my Mexican family—cooking the same, only talk different. I explain them, customary India, same Mexico. Everything same, only language different. They make roti over there, sit on floor, all custom India the same Mexico, living custom; I go to Mexico two three times, you know, not too far. All same India, all the same. Adobe house, Mexico, sit on floor, to make tortilla, *roti* you know, all kinds of food; eat here plate, some place got table, bench. India the same, eat floor, two board cutting, make bench.<sup>60</sup>

Not only did the men view the women as coming from a similar material culture, some of these long-time wives came to view themselves as 'Hindu'. They meant that they cooked Indian food, they conducted their households in a 'Hindu' fashion to suit their husbands, and they were cut off from Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. They did not mean they had changed their religion, but they identified themselves with their husbands and the other Punjabi men rather than with any Mexican-American community.<sup>61</sup>

Another important characteristic of the happy marriages was respect for both religions and mutual support of religious observances. The very

few men said to have converted to Catholicism also remained Hindu or Sikh in important ways. And the couples and their children in these long-lasting marriages voiced a strong belief that there was only one God. As Mola and Susanna Singh said, Susanna speaking first: 'Well, God gives a lot of different languages, you know, but I don't think so many Gods;' while Mola said, 'Only one God.'<sup>62</sup>

The children's religious training was not a vigorously contested matter between Punjabi husbands and Mexican wives. The men encouraged their wives to continue their own religious beliefs and practices and themselves served as godfathers in the *compadrazgo* system. They wanted to inculcate respect for Sikhism, Hinduism or Islam while they encouraged their children to practise Catholicism (or whatever form of Christianity their wives practised).

For the children born to these biethnic couples, cultural identity could be problematic, both within and outside the family. Socialisation into an essentially Mexican-American domestic culture marked their early years. The babies' names, their home language, their religious training, all reflected the mothers' authority in the domestic realm. Almost all of the children born to these couples were given Hispanic rather than Indian first names, so that their names seem both strange and beautiful: Maria Jesuita Singh, Jose Akbar Khan, Armando Chand. A few fathers insisted upon recording Indian names for their sons, but these were seldom used. In the home, most children spoke Spanish with their mothers and Spanish or English with their fathers; few learned to speak Punjabi. (Older boys, prominent among them Mexican step-sons, who worked in the fields with 'Hindu crews' did learn Punjabi appropriate to the work situation.) Aunts and grandmothers, godmothers and other children reinforced the Spanish-speaking culture of the mothers, and most of the Punjabi-Mexican children attended schools in which Spanish-speaking children predominated. Outsiders usually classified these Punjabi-Mexican children as 'Mexicans': to this day, some people in the Imperial Valley think of Singh as a Mexican-American surname. But the 'Mexican' identification caused difficulties for the children. There was prejudice from Mexican-Americans, and the Punjabi men had such pride in their heritage that the children ultimately grew curious about and proud of their 'Hindu side' as well.

The wives and children learned little about Indian religious beliefs and practices during the men's early decades in California. Many Muslim, Hindu and Sikh men did not even transmit correct English terms for their religious faiths to their children. Thus some members of the second generation continue to refer to all of the Punjabi men as Hindus without

realising it is usually a misnomer, and a few men are designated by such improbable names as Ali Singh or Ghulam Singh. Others refer to the Singhs or the Mohammads, knowing the men were not really Hindus but unsure of the correct religious terms. The fathers were mostly unable to read, teach or explain their own religious texts, if they had copies. Furthermore, the children did not know the Punjabi language, much less Arabic, so that the beauties of the Granth Sahib or the Quran were inaccessible to them. The Roman Catholic Church was clearly hospitable to these families, allowing the Punjabi men to stand as godfathers in church ceremonies and Hispanising their names on baptismal certificates, and in some cases, allowing the Punjabi men to be married in religious rites without any meaningful evidence of conversion to Catholicism.<sup>63</sup> The idea of religion continued to receive the men's support, in the best tradition of Indian tolerance. The men reasoned that the inculcation of religion was a woman's responsibility, so it followed that in these biethnic families the children should be brought up in the wife's religion.

Most of the external signs differentiating Sikh, Muslim and Hindu in India had disappeared. In outward appearance, the Sikhs initially had been marked by the beard, long hair and turban required by orthodox Sikhism. Retention of these characteristics proved difficult in the face of American prejudice. Moreover, many wives preferred their men to be clean-shaven. Several women explicitly linked the giving up of the turban and beard to their wedding day. 'The labor camp men wore turbans and the family men took them off', said one daughter.<sup>64</sup> There was no case of a Sikh son of a Mexican mother wearing the turban, and even the sons of the two 'real' Sikh couples in central and northern California did not wear turbans. Some Sikhs and Muslims maintained social distance based on religious boundaries stemming from India while others did not; it was just as common for the children to pick up prejudices against other Punjabis in the same religious category as in different ones.<sup>65</sup>

While the Punjabi-Mexican children grew up taking great pride in their Indian heritage, most of the Punjabi men who married and founded families in California deliberately or otherwise de-emphasised Punjabi language and culture. One reason was the demands made on their time by work. Thus one daughter reported revealingly, 'My dad talked about India to his grandchildren, he had time then.' But another reason was commitment to their new country. They accepted the restrictions on immigration as permanent and considered their children Americans. Another daughter remembers her shock and sense of loss when her father suddenly stopped the evening sessions of Punjabi lessons and stories about the Punjab—he announced that since his children were Americans, they had no need to



learn his language and culture. Other fathers gruffly turned back queries about the Punjab and its language, stating that they were here now and there was no point learning about India.<sup>66</sup>

But if the men and their families had travelled far from India, India came to them in the form of a massive immigration from South Asia after 1965. The arrival of large numbers of new immigrants from South Asia after 1965 has irrevocably altered the social landscape and the ways in which the Punjabi pioneers and their descendants construct their identities.<sup>67</sup> Members of the second generation who have tended to identify themselves as Hindu or East Indian have found little in common with the new immigrants from India and Pakistan, and the new immigrants bring with them boundaries which had been non-existent or blurred by the earlier immigrants. The 'old Hindus' had all been from one province, all Punjabi speakers. Furthermore, they were rural people, largely uneducated in any language. They made major adaptations to live and farm in the United States, changing dress and diet, learning new languages and marrying new wives from different cultural backgrounds. They depended upon local people—bankers, farmers, storekeepers, landowners and county officials—for their very livelihood. Colonial subjects when they came, they fought for India's freedom, but also for their political rights in the United States.

The barriers to meaningful relations with the Punjabi homeland made these early immigrants and their families unconcerned with judgments which might be formed about them back in India. They proceeded to become both 'Hindu' and 'American' in ways ranging from adopting new concepts of marriage based on romantic love to religious practices which treated men and women equally. The 'Hindu' category in the United States included all the early immigrants. Personal names lost much of the religious and regional meaning they held back in the Punjab and religious differences receded in importance, particularly for the children. Most members of the second generation married outside the Punjabi-Mexican community. Despite these changes and the adoption of a strong 'American' component of individual identity, most Punjabi-Mexicans have retained an allegiance to an identity as 'Hindus'. Even the early immigrants' spouses, predominantly Hispanic women, actively contributed to the construction and maintenance of a 'Hindu' identity in the United States, an identity necessarily very different from that being constructed now by the more recent immigrant families from South Asia.<sup>68</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The experiences of the Punjabi pioneers and their families draw attention to the ongoing process of identity and community formation, to the flexibility of ethnic identity and of culture. They contribute to theories displacing the old anthropological concept of 'cultures' marching in bounded units through time and space, to new theories about 'connected social fields'<sup>69</sup> which can be moved, stretched and interwoven in multiple ways.

James Clifford refers to them as 'changed by their travel but marked by places of origin',<sup>70</sup> and it is time to place scholarly attention on the first part of his statement rather than the last. The history the Punjabi pioneers and their descendants have written in America is no less authentic for the changes brought about by context, generation and gender.<sup>71</sup> Contrasts between Punjabis in the Punjab and their various places of settlement outside India are to be expected and provide opportunities for comparative social science research. Norman Buchignani and Bruce La Brack make this point about Sikh immigrants in California and Canada, as does Verne Dusenbery about Sikh immigrants in Canada and Singapore.<sup>72</sup> The Punjabi immigrants abroad will construct new personal, ethnic and national identities in the diaspora countries, and they will do so through engagement with the very different and very particular context in which they are settling. As Stuart Hall remarked, 'All identity is constructed across difference',<sup>73</sup> and there are significant differences in the demographic constellations and national projects that Punjabis are encountering in their places of settlement outside the Punjab. The title of a recent article by Paul Gilroy put it well: 'It Ain't Where You're From, It's Where You're At' (and the British Punjabi singer Apache Indian nicely illustrates the argument therein).<sup>74</sup> Other writers remind us of the power relations embedded in 'situatedness' and the 'politics of location'.<sup>75</sup> Again, the point is that identities are formed in interaction with other particular economic, political and social settings, and the 'Punjabi cultural identity', constructed and changed over time back in the Punjab,<sup>76</sup> is sure to be transformed, many layered and diverse in the diaspora setting. The Punjabi pioneers to America in the early twentieth century encountered more constraints than opportunities when they migrated, but they created a complex and interesting history which deserves full recognition, one from which both scholars and more recent Punjabi immigrants have much to learn.

*SAsian*

## Notes

- See the entries in Jane Singh, ed., *South Asians in North America: An Annotated and Selected Bibliography* (Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, 1988); Harish K. Puri, *Ghadar Movement* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 2nd edn, 1992); Joan M. Jensen, *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); John Stratton Hawley and Gurinder Singh Mann (eds), *Studying the Sikhs: Issues for North America* (Albany: State University of New York, 1993). Anannya Bhattacharjee notices a 'selective amnesia' about the early immigrants (which she attributes, I think incorrectly, to their political radicalness). 'The Habit of Ex-Nomination: Nation, Woman, and the Indian Immigrant Bourgeoisie', *Public Culture*, 5:1, (fall 1992), 32. Omar Afzal refers to the 'failure' of the early Muslim families: 'An Overview of Asian-Indian Muslims in the United States,' in Omar Khalidi (ed.), *Indian Muslims in North America* (Watertown MA: South Asia Press, n.d. [1990?]), 10-11. See Karen Iakson Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), for a detailed history of family life.
- Stuart Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity', especially, 275-77, in Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew (eds), *Modernity and its Futures* (London: Polity Press, 1992); Paul Gilroy, *There ain't no Blacks in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), especially, 154-56; Homi Bhabha, 'Interrogating Identity', in Homi Bhabha (ed.), *Identity* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1987), 5-11.
- For the various laws, see Harold S. Jacoby, 'Administrative Restriction of Asian Immigration into the United States, 1907-1917', *Population Review* 25 (1982), 35-40, and 'More sinned Against than Sinning', *Pacific Historian* 11: 4, 1-2, 8. The 1917 bill correlated physical with cultural distance and denied entry to immigrants from areas west of the 110th and east of the 50th meridian (Asia). US Statutes at Large, 1915-1917, 'An Act to Regulate the Immigration of Aliens to, and the Residence of Aliens in, the United States' 64th Congress, P.L. 876, 2nd sess., Vol. 39, pt. 1, ch. 29, for the specific meridians in the 1917 law. For the Alien Land Laws, devised to halt the rapid Japanese progress in agriculture, see Karen Leonard, 'Punjabi Farmers and California's Alien Land Law', *Agricultural History* 59: 4, 549-62; and 'The Pakhar Singh Murders: A Punjabi Response to California's Alien Land Law', *Amerasia Journal* 11:1 (1984), 75-87.
- They were also called 'Mexidos' or 'Half and Halves'.
- Karen Leonard, 'Finding One's Own Place: The Imposition of Asian Landscapes on Rural California', in James Ferguson, Akhil Gupta, and Liisa Malkki (eds), *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology* (forthcoming).
- El Centro Progress* (El Centro), 5 December 1919, 33, 44, 80, 122.
- US National Archives, Record Group 29, Census of US Population, Imperial County, California, 1910 (manuscript census).
- US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States: Population, 1920* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992), Vol. III, 109-10, 112-17, 123-24. Imperial County had the highest proportion among California counties of people born in Mexico, 14.7 per cent, followed by Ventura County with 14.1 per cent and San Bernardino County with 9.7 per cent. Allyn Campbell Loosley, 'Foreign Born Population of California, 1848-1920', Master's Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1927, 114-15. People from India were not counted in the 1920 Census, but I rely on a handbook (of 268) done by an Imperial County resident, Ram Chand, cited in 'Survey of Race Relations', Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California, #232. Ram Chand, p. 4, interviewed by W.C. Smith, 1 June 1924, El Centro.
- Joseph J. Anderholt and Dorothy M. Anderholt (eds), *The History of the Imperial Valley Swiss* (Holtville: Imperial Valley Swiss Club, 1984), 7-8, 10.
- US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States taken in the year of 1910: Abstract of the Census with Supplement for California* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), 601 for the 1910 Census sex ratio; for 1920, US Department of Commerce, *Fourteenth Census: Population, 1920*, Vol. III: 113, 131.
- F.C. Farr, *The History of Imperial County, California* (Berkeley: Elms and Frank, 1918), 480. Accounts by the early Swiss women stress the difficulties posed by the hot climate, living in tents or dirt-floored shelters, the lack of ice, electricity or running water, and the suspenseful fording of irrigation ditches in horse and buggy. Anderholt and Anderholt, *Imperial Valley Swiss*.
- See Shiro Fujioka, 'Traces of a Journey', translated by Mabel Saito Hall for Sucheng Chan from *Ayumi No Ato*, Japanese, published in Los Angeles by Kankō Koenkai (1957), 464-65, for an account of the first Japanese bride's arrival in the Imperial Valley.
- A cattle rancher recounted that during the early 1910s a Cahuilla Indian was refused a meal in a Brawley restaurant and a 'colored' cowboy met critical comments from other guests in a rooming house in Imperial, although 'the old Chinese restaurant on Main Street was a reliable and hospitable place'. Lester Reed, *Oldtimers of Southeastern California* (Redlands: Lester Reed, 1967), 11, 115, 198.
- Quote from Mola Singh, Selma, 1982. In a 1921 court case, the defence attorney for one Bishen Singh, charged with attacking Amar Singh with an axe in Brawley, alleged that Amar Singh provoked the attack by saying, 'Before we were in town and now we're in Mexican town, so let's fight.' Landmarks in the court case included the Chinese store and the Filipino Hotel. Criminal Case 987, Office of the County Clerk, Imperial County, 1921.
- Kathryn Cramp, Louise F. Shields and Charles A. Thomsen, Study of the Mexican Population in Imperial Valley, California, University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library, mimeo, 1926, 15-19. Only Holtville remained small and homogeneous enough to avoid this kind of segregation—few Mexicans, Japanese or blacks settled there.
- William Irvin Darnell, 'The Imperial Valley: Its Physical and Cultural Geography', Master's thesis, San Diego State College, 90-91, 95.
- Ibid.*, 90-105; Adon Poli, *Land Ownership and Operating Tenure in Imperial Valley, California* (Berkeley: US Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1942); and Robert L. Finley, 'An Economic History of the Imperial Valley of California to 1971', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1974, 158.
- See Poli, *Land Ownership*, 48, for 1910-20, and 49-51; Cramp, Shields and Thomsen, Mexican Population, 2, for absentee owners.
- By the measure of value of production per acre, the Imperial Valley was the most productive: Howard F. Gregor, 'Regional Hierarchies in California Agricultural

- Production: 1939-1954', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 53 (1963), 30.
20. *Holtville Tribune* (Holtville), 16 September 1910.
  21. *Ibid.*, 4 February 1918. As early as 1907, the *California Fruit Grower* had predicted that Indian men working in the Fresno vineyards would not long be satisfied to labour in the fields: 'The Labour Problem', 24 August 1907, 1.
  22. Mr Robert Hays, in Paul Taylor, 'Field Notes' for his book, 'Mexican Labor in the United States, 1927-1930', circa 1928.
  23. The local directories are in the Imperial Public Library, now relocated in El Centro. Early issues were titled *Imperial Valley Business and Resident Directory* (1912-13), *Thurston's Imperial Valley Directory* (1914-21), and finally *Imperial Valley Directory* (1924-26). For telephone subscribers, *Imperial County Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company*, 15 April 1918 (in the Pioneers Museum, Imperial), US Postmaster General, 'Register of Money Orders Issued, Jan. 2, 1909 through Nov. 5, 1910, and July 16, 1912, through Dec. 18, 1913'. Joseph Anderholt directed me to these in the Holtville City Hall.
  24. Dr Sucheng Chan, University of California, Santa Barbara, made her notes on these leases available to me. These leases, like other early sources, show the Sikhs arriving slightly later than the Punjabi Muslims and Hindus. Many partnership disputes appear in local civil and criminal case records, since litigation was constantly resorted to when the verbal contracts were not kept. In one case, the court helped set up an arbitration board with seven members elected by both parties, all of them Punjabis from Calipatria (one Muslim, one Hindu and five Sikhs). The defendant was indebted to the plaintiff for two years of labour performed, and in the end the sheriff sold the cotton crop to secure payment; Civil Case 11015, Office of the County Clerk, Imperial County (Moola Singh vs. Georgia May Singh), 1923. 'Hindoo' or 'Hindu' was a category in the court records: Cramp, Shields and Thomson, *Mexican Population*, 12.
  25. For the bankruptcies, see US Government, Los Angeles District Court, 'Bankruptcy Records for Indexes I, II, and III (1907-1917, 1917-1925, 1925-1932)', Laguna Niguel Federal Archives. Length of residence in the same locality and the establishment of stable tenancy relationships with landowners undoubtedly helped Punjabi farmers succeed, such as has been shown for California's Japanese farmers then: Robert Higgs, 'The Wealth of Japanese Tenant Farmers in California, 1909', *Agricultural History* 53:2 (1979), 492.
  26. Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, 55-57.
  27. See *ibid.*, 73-78, for details about childbearing, fertility and mortality, and 106-14 for details about murders, divorce and remarriage.
  28. Probably the March licence could not be implemented; in any case, Sher Singh took out another licence (for another woman, too) in November. *Holtville Tribune*, 16 March and 10 November 1916.
  29. *El Centro Progress*, 5 April 1918.
  30. Interview with Mola Singh, Selma, 1982.
  31. The Judge in a bankruptcy case said, 'Your wife is a Mexican girl, isn't she?' US Government, 'Bankruptcy Records', case number 6212 (Refugio Gonzalez Deol). The Anglo witnesses to the 1916 and 1917 marriages were Arthur Shephard and County Horticultural Commissioner F.W. Waite.
  32. In 1918, the *El Centro Progress* headlined 'Race Riot is Staged', a fight between Mexicans and Punjabis in the cotton fields near Heber over a Punjabi's marriage to a Mexican woman: *Holtville Tribune* clipping dated 9 (month torn off) 1918. Four years later, two Mexican men abducted two Mexican women, sisters, who had married Punjabis: *Holtville Tribune*, 9 March and 10 March 1922; confirmed by Janie Diwan Poonian, daughter of one of the women, Yuba City, 1982.
  33. Rosalinda M. Gonzalez, 'Chicanas and Mexican Immigrant Families 1920-1940: Women's Subordination and Family Exploitation', in Joan Jensen and Lois Scharf (eds), *Decades of Discontent* (Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 63; Ruth Allen, *The Labor of Women in the Production of Cotton* (Chicago, 1933). Cotton picking was the only outdoor work done by Jat Sikh women in all three Central Punjab regions: Joyce Pettigrew, *Robber Noblemen: A Study of the Political System of the Sikh Jats* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 48; Malcolm Lyall Darling, *Rusticus Loquitur* (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1930), 175-76; Michelle Maskiell, 'Women's Work and the Household Economy in Punjab', 16th Conference on South Asia, Madison, Wisconsin, 1987, 3 and 7.
  34. Taylor, 'Field Notes', file on labour contractors and agencies, 103-107a. Some early Punjabi-Mexican marriages took place in El Paso; others took place in Canutillo, Texas, where Punjabis were farming cotton, and in Las Cruces, New Mexico, where there was no waiting period. See the many autobiographical statements in Manuel Gamio (ed.), *The Life Story of the Mexican Immigrant* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971).
  35. Two Punjabis had taken wives in northern California: in 1913, one Alice Singh, Canadian-born, married a Sikh in Sacramento, and in the same year Rosa Domingo, a common-law wife, was murdered by her Muslim husband in Contra Costa County. Sacramento County marriage licence 40:459 for the marriage of Alice Singh and Dayal Singh, 15 May 1913; the *Contra Costa Gazette* (Sacramento), 25 October 1913, for the murder (Harold Jacoby told me of this story).
  36. Marriage licences 5:164 and 5:388, Imperial County Recorder's Office, El Centro; and marriage licence 5:447, Imperial County Recorder's Office. Marrying sisters may not have been unusual for Punjabis. 'The Hindus here married sisters, yeah, same as back in the Punjab', said Mola Singh (Selma, 1982).
  37. Interview with Teresa Garewal, Holtville, 1981.
  38. My categories are based upon marriage, settlement, and social network patterns. Copies of the master list of couples are in three University of California libraries: Irvine, Berkeley (the South/Southeast Asia Library/Gadar Collection), and Los Angeles. I define marriages here as relationships which were long-lasting and/or produced children; most were legal marriages, although I made no effort to track down all marriage certificates. I included couples through 1949 because it took a few years to be confident about the extension of citizenship to Asian Indians in 1946.
  39. By the late 1920s some Punjabi-Mexican families had settled in the southern San Joaquin Valley, and in the 1930s some families moved to northern California, the Yuba City/Marysville area, and to Arizona, in and near Phoenix.
  40. Computer analysis of marriage licences for apparent first marriages in this country gave these figures (for 101 Punjabi men).
  41. For Rosemary Khan and Ram Rattan Singh, see San Joaquin county birth certificate 3950-288 (1927) and death certificate 3950-485 (1927); Tulare county birth certificate

- 22 (1930); Fresno county birth certificate 17:275 (1931). I could not trace any descendants.
42. See Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices* 68 and 248, for analysis of these 25 marriages (through 1918).
  43. The 'Constitution and By-Laws of the Hindustanee's Welfare and Reform Society of America', (n.p. [Imperial]: Hindustanes' Welfare and Reform Society of America, n.d. [circa 1914] contained a clause warning the men not to marry "colored" women. To explain this, one man said, 'why should the Punjabis ally themselves with a group hated by the whites, when they had similar problems and could fight them better alone?'
  44. Nellie Soto Shine, Huntington Beach, 1982; Janie Poonian, Yuba City, 1982; Rose Chell Canaris, Calexico, 1987 (interviewed by Lupe Beltran).
  45. Interviews with Joe Mallobox, El Centro, 1982; Karmelita Kakar, San Jose, 1981; Teja and Kay Dillon, Fresno, 1982 (by Sarah Leonard); Lucy Sekhon, San Diego, 1982; Kishen Singh Deol, Corona, 1981; Lola Dhillon, Holtville, 1981. Sally Maynez Dhaliwal told of a Punjabi who gave her father money when he went to El Paso and asked him to bring back a woman; her dad spent the money and said he could not find one (Holtville, 1983).
  46. Norma Saikhon, Brawley, 1981 (interviewed by Ernesto Vargas).
  47. Ramesh Murarka, 'Pratap Singh Brar—Pioneering Spirit Overcame 37 Years of Loneliness', *India West*, 3 July 1981, 12-13 (Brar lived in Fresno).
  48. A woman marrying an ineligible alien became ineligible herself. The Cable Act, in effect from 1922 through 1931, provided that female (but not male) citizens marrying aliens ineligible for citizenship lost their citizenship: US Statutes at Large, 'An Act Relative to the Naturalization and Citizenship of Married Women', P.L. 1021-22, 67th Congress, 2nd sess., Vol. 42, pt. 1, ch. 411. Section 370 was repealed in 1931. Perhaps some Punjabis and Anglos were unaware of this, since some wives seemingly did hold land for the men.
  49. Before 1934, only three Imperial Valley farmers had registered as guardians, in 1929, 1932 and 1933. Probate records, Imperial County, California, and Maricopa County, Arizona. The Punjabis adopted that strategy only after the 1933 Imperial County indictment of some Punjabis and Anglos for conspiring to evade the Alien Land Law by forming corporations.
  50. Non-Catholic Punjabi men seem to have been accepted as godfathers by Catholic churches throughout the American Southwest, albeit sometimes given Hispanic first names on official documents (for example, Arturo Gangara for Ganga Ram). The reasons for this are not entirely clear but it did not lead to conversions to Catholicism.
  51. Interviews with Teresa Garewal, Holtville, 1981; Lucy Sekhon, San Diego, 1982; Sophia Din, Brawley, 1981; and Emma Smiley, Sacramento, 1982.
  52. See Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, 93-95.
  53. See Puri, *Ghadar Movement*. Puri does include material on the Punjabis' family life too.
  54. Interviews with Isabel Singh Garcia, Yuba City, 1982; Karmelita Kakar, San Jose, 1982; and Alfred Sidhu, Sacramento, 1982.
  55. Interview with Mola Singh, Selma, 1982.
  56. See Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, 106-14.
  57. Interviews with Mary Garewal Gill, Holtville, 1981; Kishen S. Deol, Corona, 1981. Alfred Sidhu, Sacramento, 1982; Mary S. Rai, Yuba City, 1981.
  58. Interviews with Mola Singh, Selma, 1983; Rose Chell Canaris, 1987; Savarn Singh, El Centro, 1984; Mrs. Ganga Singh Bhatti, taped in Live Oak, 1989 (by Ted S. Sibba of Davis—thanks to him for the tape).
  59. After the citizenship law changed in 1946, some wives visited their husbands' home villages in India: Interviews with Lala Garewal, Holtville, 1981; Sophia Din, Brawley, 1981; Mary Garewal Gill, Holtville, 1982; Anna Sandhu, Calipatria, 1982; Caroline Shine Sunghera, Huntington Beach 1982; Laura Sedoo, Fresno, 1982; Irene Afzal Khan, Willows, 1988.
  60. Interview with Mola Singh, Selma, 1981.
  61. This sense of 'being Hindu' is discussed in Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, 131 and 206.
  62. Interview with Mola and Susanna Mesa Rodriguez Singh, Selma, 1983.
  63. Catholic Church records, Holtville; and examples from elsewhere from Karmelita Kakar, San Jose, 1982, and Helen Ram Walsh, Hercules, 1988. Marriages without conversion occurred in the Imperial Valley (Sally Maynez to Aya S. Dhaliwal) and elsewhere (Susanna Mesa Rodriguez and Mola Singh in Selma).
  64. Interviews with Lala Garewal and Mary Garewal Gill, Holtville, 1981, and Verdie Montgomery, Sacramento, 1982.
  65. Descendants of Muslims differentiated by language and caste (Pushtu and Urdu, Rajput and Arain); descendants of Sikhs talked about caste and regional origin (Jat and Chuhra, Malwa, Doaba and Majha).
  66. Amelia Singh Netervala, Los Angeles, 1988; Janie Diwan Poonian, Yuba City, 1982.
  67. For the challenges the new immigrants presented to the old ones and their families, see Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, Chs 9-11.
  68. Karen Leonard, 'Ethnic Identity and Gender: South Asians in the United States', in Milton Israel and N.K. Wagle (eds), *Ethnicity, Identity and Migration* (Toronto: Center for South Asian Studies, University of Toronto, 1992).
  69. The phrase is Sally Falk Moore's, *Social Facts and Fabrications* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 4-5; and see James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, 'Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference', *Cultural Anthropology* 7:1 (1992), 6-23.
  70. James Clifford, 'Notes on Theory and Travel', in James Clifford and Vivek Dhareshwar (eds), *Travelling Theory Travelling Theorists* (Santa Cruz: Center for Cultural Studies, 1989), 188.
  71. I have argued this quite forcefully in 'Flawed Transmission? Punjabi Pioneers in California', in a forthcoming book edited by Pashaura Singh from the University of Michigan.
  72. Norman Buchignani, 'Conception of Sikh Culture in the Development of a Comparative Analysis of the Sikh Diaspora', in Joseph T. O'Connell, Milton Israel, Willard G. Oxtoby with W.H. McLeod and J.S. Grewal (eds), *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto, Center for South Asian Studies, 1988), 287-90; Bruce La Brack, 'California's "Punjabi Century": Changing Punjabi/Sikh Identities', paper given at the First International Conference on Punjabi Studies, Coventry University, 26 June 1994; Veme A. Dusenberry, 'The Poetics and

Politics of Nationalism and Multiculturalism: Diasporan Sikhs in Pluralist Politics', *American Ethnologist* (Forthcoming).

73. See Stuart Hall's discussion, 'New Ethnicities' in Michael Kieth and Steve Pile (eds), *Place and Politics of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1993), 252, 259.
74. Paul Gilroy, 'It Ain't Where You're From, It's Where You're At: The Dialectics of Diasporic Identification', *Third Text* (1987), 3-16.
75. See Parminder Bachu, 'Multiple Migrants and Multiple Diasporas: Cultural Reproduction and Transformation among British Punjabi Women in the 1990s Britain', paper presented at the First International Conference on Punjab Studies, Coventry University, 26 June, 1994.
76. See Harjot S. Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Three papers presented at the First International Conference on Punjab Studies, Coventry University, 25 June 1994, are also relevant: Indu Banga, 'Arya Samaj and Punjabi identity'; Anil Sethi, "'Hindu Water", "Muslim Water": Syncretism, Commensality and Community in late 19th and early 20th Century Punjab'; and Darshan Singh, 'Shah Mohammad and Punjabi Identity'.

## The Punjabi Pioneer Experience in America: Recognition or Denial?

Karen Leonard

University of California  
Irvine

This article reviews the experience of Punjabi pioneers in California with particular reference to Punjabi-Mexican families of the early settlers. It argues that their history confirms the flexibility of ethnic identity and culture, and helps to displace the old anthropological concept of 'culture' marching in bounded units through time and space. The Punjabi pioneers to America in the early twentieth century encountered more constraints than opportunities when they migrated, but they created a complex and interesting history which deserves full recognition, one from which both scholars and more recent Punjabi immigrants have much to learn.

Most of the early Punjabi immigrants from India experienced family life in the US as members of a biethnic community, as husbands of women of Mexican and Mexican-American ancestry. These men were not only the pioneer immigrants to America from the Punjab, they were the pioneer immigrants to America from India. Yet the historical memory of their experience has been very selectively constituted, celebrating their political life but erasing their family life.<sup>1</sup> Clearly the family life of the pioneer Punjabis presents a problem to the immigrants from India who followed them decades later, for not only did these Punjabi men marry out of caste, community and religion in making these marriages in America, in many cases they left behind Punjabi spouses (and sometimes children). Later immigrants from India, confronted with the so-called 'Mexican-Hindu' or Punjabi-Mexican families, have not known quite how to deal with the fact of the several hundred biethnic marriages and children. Here I want to place the Punjabi pioneer experience in its historical context and argue that scholars of both South Asia and America, as well as later South Asian immigrants, have much to learn from a full recognition and analysis of